

Introducing the Books of I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles

The six books of I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles, were originally written as three books. They were probably divided into the six books, as we know them, in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament, about 300 BC. Since that time, all editions have followed that precedent, except for the traditional Jewish Bible, which still combines the six as three books; since the 16th Century, modern Jewish Bibles also divide the three books into six. In the Septuagint I and II Samuel and I and II Kings are referred to as the four “Books of the Kingdoms”; Jerome’s Latin Vulgate called them the “Four Books of Kings.” The use of the word “Chronicle(s)” for the books I and II Chronicles was introduced by Jerome.

It is important to remember, however, that, no matter how the books were divided, or what they were called in various periods, the content has remained the same. They are the Word of God.

The Consistent Use of “LORD”

It is interesting to me that in the six books, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles, when the word “LORD” appears, as an appellation of Deity, the YHWH form is consistently used. Thus we see the all-capitals “LORD” rendering, rather than the alternative “Lord”. When this name is combined with “God” it is always “LORD God.”

I know of no explanation for this. Perhaps the final compilers of these records, wished to emphasize the point, and leave no room for doubt, that in these important events we are hearing about the unique, self-existent, YHWH, the almighty LORD of the Universe. Perhaps it is because, during the entire period there was the ongoing temptation for the Hebrew people to embrace the paganism of the heathen nations around them, the sin that did so easily beset them, with its sexuality and false, pagan gods. As we have already seen, two of the three basic names for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *Elohim* (God), and *Adonai* (Lord), can also be used to refer to pagan gods, or to human masters, when the first letters are not capitalized (i.e. “god” and “lord”). However, when either of these names appears in all capitals (i.e. “LORD”) it means YHWH, the unique, self-existent One, the Great I AM. When this name is used, there can be **no doubt** as to Whom it refers.

NOTE: It is difficult to keep the content of the next six books sorted out in the mind. For a useful, slightly expanded, introduction to each book, and for an outline of the contents of each, see “Summaries of the Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles,” and “The Kings of Israel and Judah,” in Part IV (Selected Topical

Summaries). It may be helpful to keep these documents handy as we make our way through these six books.

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The History, Book 4

I Samuel

The book of I Samuel tells the story of the last two Judges of Israel (Eli and Samuel), the transition of Israel from a theocracy, with God as King, to a monarchy with human kings, and the beginning of that monarchy with King Saul. The record of I Samuel covers a period of about 100 years.

The leading character in the book is Samuel, priest, Judge of Israel (the last), and prophet. He was the prophet on whom King Saul depended for guidance from God, the one who anointed Saul as king, anointed David to be Saul's successor as king, and the one to whom David fled as Saul pursued him to kill him.

“Prophet” and “Seer.” In the next six Books of History there will be frequent appearances of the words “prophet” and “seer.” There are actually three Hebrew words translated as “prophet” or “seer.” The one most commonly appearing is *nabi*, meaning “a declarer or announcer.” The other two Hebrew words are *roeh* and *hozeh*, both meaning “one who sees.” The general meaning of all three words is that of one chosen by God, to know and to see the hidden things of God, and to reveal, announce, and declare them to the Israelite people. Hebrew scholars probe deeply into the etymologies (origins) of these words, and see subtle differences in their meanings; however, as usual, we shall keep things as simple as possible and treat them all to mean essentially the same thing: one chosen and anointed by God to speak forth his messages to the people.

In thinking of prophets and prophecy it is important to remember that these prophetic messages **may**, or **may not**, reveal things about the future. A prophetic message is simply a message from God to the people, one inspired by God, written or spoken, regardless of its content and setting in terms of time.

There will be prophetic content in the five Books of Poetry and, of course, in the 17 Books of Prophecy. And, as we shall see, there will be prophets and prophecies in the New Testament; but that will involve Greek, not Hebrew, and we will deal with that when we get there.

A. Author. The first 24 chapters were probably written by Samuel himself. The last seven chapters (25-31) were written after Samuel's death, probably from the records of Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer¹. Some of the content may be from the "Book of Jasher," which seems to have been a book of poetic odes and songs concerning the deeds of certain heroes of Israel. There are only two references to the Book of Jasher in the Bible: Joshua 10:13 and II Samuel 1:17-18. There is no copy of this book known to have survived.

Although the final compiler of these records is unknown, I Samuel was probably put into its finished form by Isaiah (see II Chronicles 32:32; and note that "*and*" is in italics, i.e. the word is not in the Hebrew manuscripts).

B. Place and Date. Isaiah probably completed the work of compiling the records in Jerusalem, about 700 BC.

C. Theme. The book of I Samuel tells the story of the life and ministry of Samuel; the time is about 1,100 BC. For me, the theme is the value of a faithful, incorruptible, man of God--a lighthouse of truth in the midst of wicked darkness, an unmovable point of reference in times of confusion, and the voice of God to rebuke error and confirm righteousness. To me, Samuel personifies the term, "man of God."

D. Highlights. Highlights of I Samuel include the following:

1. The Miraculous Birth of a Prophet/Judge. (Chapter 1)

In the last days of the Judges, Hannah, a godly woman of Ramatha-im-zophim, is barren, and tormented about it by her husband's other wife². On the annual pilgrimage to the Tabernacle at Shiloh to offer sacrifices, she prays in the Tabernacle for a son. She prays so fervently, but silently, that Eli, High Priest and Judge of Israel, thinks she is drunk. He rebukes her; but, when he finds out the truth, he prays for her to conceive a son. She conceives and bears a son whom she names Samuel ("asked of God"), for he is the answer to her prayer. When Samuel is weaned (in those days babies/children were weaned at about age three to five), she returns to Shiloh and presents the child to old Eli, where he will stay and grow up in the Tabernacle, "lent to the LORD" as a Nazarite.

NOTES: *The first verse of Chapt 1 can be confusing for two reasons:*

a. The full name of Samuel's birth place, which later became his permanent residence (Ramatha-im-zophim), is used only here. Elsewhere in the AV (KJV) it is called Ramah.

b. Elkanah, Samuel's father, a Levite of the line of Kohath, is descended from one "Zuph, an Ephraimite"; this makes it appear that Samuel is then of the tribe of

¹I Chronicles 29:29.

² There is disagreement among Bible scholars as to exactly where Samuel's birthplace was; a likely location is Ramah of Benjamin, about 8 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Ephraim, and not of Levi. The solution to the problem is that in this verse "Ephrathite" refers to the fact that Zuph was a native of Ephratah, the ancient name for Bethlehem. Elkanah's Levitical lineage is made clear in I Chron 6:27-34.

c. Here again we see an example of the wonderful workings of the mind and heart of God. Of Elkanah's two wives, the Lord chooses the childless and scorned wife to be the mother of Samuel, one of the greatest of the prophets. God delights in choosing to use and exalt those who, in the world's system of values, are inferior, rejected, and scorned.

2. Corrupt Priests and a Righteous Child. (2:11-26)

Old Eli was a righteous Judge and High Priest, but weak; his two sons were priests but were extremely corrupt, and Eli failed to correct or control them. In this corrupt setting, little Samuel functioned as a priest-in-training, under the guidance of Eli, wearing a little ephod that his mother had made for him. Each year, when she made the annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, she brought young Samuel another, larger ephod. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, functioned as priests, but they were corrupt in many ways. They were so blatantly corrupt that they engaged in fornication with the women who served in the Tabernacle, at the door of the Tabernacle³! Their sinning was not only shamelessly public, but carried on in the place which was exceeded in sacredness only by the Holy of Holies! Eli rebuked them, but they refused to repent; so God found it necessary that they should die, for there was no other remedy for this contamination of the Tabernacle and the priesthood⁴.

In all of that sinful darkness, little Samuel must have glittered like a diamond in the midst of a garbage dump.

3. A Prophet Comes with Bad News. (2:27-36)

A nameless prophet arrives at Shiloh with extremely bad news for Eli. Because of his failure to control his corrupt sons, they will be killed, in one day, and Eli's family lineage will become extinct. What family Eli has will live in extreme poverty, begging for a morsel of bread and a piece of silver, and will all die without descendants⁵. There is no record of Eli's reaction to this horrible news; but we may be pretty certain that he was not surprised.

4. God Is Not Speaking. (3:1)

³ In the case of one of them, Phinehas, it was adultery, for he had a wife; perhaps they both had wives.

⁴ Verse 25 expresses a fundamental principle in the economy of God. If a man wrongs another man, the situation can be resolved by the proper human judge; but when a man sins against God, no human mediator is sufficient; only Christ can intercede and resolve the transgression, and He seems not to have assumed his ministry as Mediator until after his death and resurrection.

⁵ The Hebrew word translated here as "piece of silver" is *agowrah*, the coin of least value in that day; the word appears nowhere else in the Bible. See in this regard I Kings 2:27.

In this time, there was no flow of revelation from God to Israel. This is not difficult to understand, considering what was going on in Shiloh at the Tabernacle, with old Eli unable (or unwilling) to control his two "priest" sons.

5. Little Samuel's First Prophecy--and a Hard One. (3:2-14)

With Eli and Samuel asleep in a building or tent adjacent to the Tabernacle, the Lord breaks His long silence with a visit to little Samuel in the pre-dawn hours ("ere the lamp of God [kept burning in the Tabernacle at night]] went out"). Three times, the Lord speaks to little Samuel by name, and twice he thinks it is Eli calling him. Twice, Eli just tells him to go back to bed; the third time, however, Eli realizes that it is the voice of the Lord, and tells Samuel what to do if the Lord speaks again. The Lord comes to Samuel, apparently in a bodily form ("And the Lord came and **stood**..."), again calls to him by name, and Samuel responds as Eli told him to do. The Lord gives the little boy a terrible prophecy for Eli; the prophecy is a confirmation of the one spoken to Eli earlier by the unnamed prophet and, in addition, He tells Samuel that the destruction which He will bring upon the family of Eli will be shocking to all Israelites who hear of it ("both ears...shall tingle"), and there will be no sacrifice that can reverse the judgment.

6. Curtains for Eli; but the Lord Returns to Shiloh. (3:15-21)

Samuel lies awake the rest of the night, and is afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said. As he goes about his early morning duties, Eli calls to him and instructs him to tell him all that the Lord had said. In what must have been the most difficult moment of his entire ministry, little Samuel gives the bad news to his mentor and spiritual father. And, in what may have been the most difficult moment of his own ministry, Eli nobly tells Samuel that he has indeed heard from the Lord, and Eli humbly accepts the awful message⁶.

Samuel grows, physically and spiritually, and his reputation as the LORD's prophet spreads throughout the land ("from Dan even to Beersheba"). From this time on, the Lord is at Shiloh as before, and revelation is again available to Israel; although Eli continues as High Priest, God speaks to Israel only through Samuel, and all of his utterances are fulfilled.

7. Ultimate Disaster: the Ark of the Covenant Is Captured. (4:1-11)

The Israelites attack the Philistines but it doesn't go well. They send for the Ark of the Covenant, thinking that its presence in their army will guarantee success the

⁶ There is much to admire about Eli as Judge; but his great failing was in not correcting the ungodly behavior of his sons. For this failure he and his family will pay a terrible price.



But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.

I Samuel 2:18

second day. The Ark is brought from Shiloh, apparently carried by Hophni and Phinehas, and placed in the camp at Ebenezer⁷. It doesn't work; the Philistines slaughter the Israelites, including the wicked priests, Hophni and Phinehas, and the unthinkable occurs: the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant⁸!

8. The Death of Eli. (4:12-22)

Old Eli, now 98 years old and blind, waits anxiously for news, fearful for the safety of the Ark. When a runner from the battlefield arrives with the news that the battle is lost, that Hophni and Phinehas are dead, and the Ark is captured, Eli falls backward off his seat, and dies of a broken neck. When Phinehas' wife hears that her husband is dead and the Ark captured, she goes into labor and delivers a son. She names him "Ichabod," meaning "the glory hath departed," and she dies. Thus the dire prophecies about Eli and his family have begun to be fulfilled, and young Samuel is now in charge--the last of the Judges.

NOTE: It is noteworthy that what caused so much distress to Eli was not the death of his wicked sons; that probably came as no surprise, because of the prophecy of the unnamed prophet, and of little Samuel's prophecy. What caused Eli such distress that he fell off his chair and broke his neck was the news that the Ark was taken by the Philistines (v 18). Although a weak man, Eli's heart was still right toward God. Here also is a suggestion that, as judge, he had a chair of considerable height in the gate; for the fall from it, combined with his age and obesity, killed him. He had judged Israel for 40 years.

9. YAHWEH versus Dagon: Not Even Close. (Chapter 5)

The victorious Philistines take the Ark of the Covenant from Ebenezer to Ashdod and place it in the temple of Dagon, their pagan god, **beside** the statue of Dagon⁹. The next morning they find the statue of Dagon fallen on its face, **before** the Ark, as if worshipping before the Ark. The pagan priests restore the statue to its place; and surely they must have wondered about what had happened. The next morning they find the statue of Dagon, again on its face **before** the Ark; but this time, Dagon's head and both hands are broken off on the threshold of the temple door. Then the people of Ashdod die ("are destroyed"), and the survivors are smitten with hemorrhoids. They finally get the message, and send the Ark to Gath¹⁰.

⁷ The Ark of the Covenant could only be moved, after being covered, and carried by two priests; and, other than Eli the High Priest, they were the only priests. Although Samuel would at times perform priestly functions, as in anointing both Saul and David as kings, he was a Levite by birth and not a priest.

⁸ This presumption of the Israelites is amazing! It is also stupid; God cannot be manipulated into blessing us, nor will He allow us to use His holy objects as magic charms.

⁹ Ebenezer was the place of the Israelite army's encampment prior to the battle; its location is unknown.

¹⁰ Gath was the hometown of Goliath, the giant later slain by David; Goliath was probably a baby or small boy at this time.

At Gath the LORD "was against the city with a very great destruction." He "smote the men of the city, both small and great," and they are smitten with hemorrhoids¹¹.

And so the men of Gath take the Ark to Ekron. By this time, however, the bad news has preceded the Ark and the Ekronites don't want anything to do with it. It is there, however; and, with its presence, many die, and the rest are smitten with hemorrhoids. It must have been terrible, for "the cry of the city went up to Heaven." An urgent meeting is convened to decide how to get rid of the Ark.

NOTES:

a. The symbolism in this chapter is significant and obvious to us; but the pagan Philistines had no eyes to see, nor ears to hear. The LORD not only caused the statue of Dagon to fall (defeat), but had arranged the statue of Dagon so as to be in a position of worship before the Ark. The second day the statue had not only fallen and was in a position of worship before the Ark, but its head (knowledge/wisdom) and its hands (power) were broken off. The pagans only understood that the power of the Israelites' Ark was great (much greater than the power they perceived in Dagon), that it was killing them and afflicting the survivors with painful hemorrhoids, and they wanted it taken away from them.

b. The Hebrew word rendered "emerald" in the Authorized Version (and as "tumors" in most modern versions) is "ofel" meaning a tumor. Because the tumors are clearly said to have been "in their secret parts" it seems obvious to me that the meaning here is hemorrhoids, a common and painful affliction.

10. The Philistines Get Rid of the Ark. (6:1-13)

As was true at Jericho, the Philistines seem to have more knowledge, and more fear, of the God of Israel than do the Israelites (verse 6). After seven months of this torment, the elders ask the pagan priests and diviners for advice. They advise sending the Ark back to the Israelites, and to send it with a trespass offering of five gold hemorrhoids and five gold mice, one of each for each of the five major Philistine cities¹². The Philistines place the gold objects in a chest, and put it, and the Ark, on a **new** cart, hitched to two **untrained** milk cows (never broken to the yoke) which have been **separated from their nursing calves**. The Philistines, as a test, watch to see what will happen next.

In one of the most underestimated miracles of the Bible, the two **untrained** cows (not trained to the yoke as draft animals), ignoring their unhappy calves bawling

¹¹ Verse 9 does not say that some of the men of Gath were killed; but in the wording the implication is clearly there; and why would the LORD treat the men of Gath differently from the men of Ashdod? It is a safe assumption that many men of Gath died, and the survivors were smitten with hemorrhoids.

¹² It is recorded that the plague of hemorrhoids struck only the five major cities; but the Lord apparently sent a plague of mice "to mar the land" over all the rest of the pagan nation.

behind them, pull the cart to the correct road without being guided, then up that road, **lowing contentedly** as they go. They arrive at Beth-shemesh, one of the 48 Levitical cities, about 10 miles east of Ekron, stopping only when the Ark is delivered to the right place; and they do all of this without any direction except by the Spirit of God¹³. The lords of the philistines follow the cart bearing the Ark and the chest with the golden hemorrhoids and mice, apparently to see where the cows will take it (verse 12). The cows take the cart to the perfect place, a Levitical city where Levites (there being now no priests) can deal with the Ark, and they stop. At that point the Philistine lords apparently turn back, convinced that this was the hand of God. It is the time of the wheat harvest and the men of Beth-shemesh are harvesting the wheat.

NOTE: The wording of v 18 suggests that there were many gold mice (an unknown number) sent with the Ark of the Covenant as a trespass offering; however, the wording of v 4 makes it clear that the number of gold mice, like the number of gold hemorrhoids, was five.

11. A Serious Mistake with Serious Consequences. (6:14-21)

Although for seven months the Israelites had apparently done nothing to recapture the Ark, the men of Beth-shemesh rejoice to see the Ark returned. They immediately chop up the cart for firewood, kill the two cows and offer them as a sacrifice upon a large rock there, the great "stone of Abel," in the field of Joshua the Bethshemite¹⁴. Bethshemesh was in north Judah, about 11 miles east of Ekron.

But then, out of curiosity, the men of Beth-shemesh open the Ark and look inside. They pay a high price for their stupid blunder: 50,070 men (perhaps plus women and children) are struck dead. Like the Philistines, and seemingly with little more understanding of their own faith than the Philistines have, the men of Beth-shemesh only want the Ark to be taken far away from them¹⁵.

NOTE: This number recorded as being slain at Beth-shemesh for defiling the sacredness of the Ark is troubling, for it is so very large. The entire population of Beth-shemesh was probably less than 50,000. The Septuagint reads essentially the same as the AV (KJV), so there is no help to be had from the Greek. The

¹³ There is nothing much more irrational than a cow when separated from her nursing calf; she will abandon all reason and do anything to get to the place where her equally unhappy calf is, both bawling frantically as if being torn by wild beasts. Anyone who has ever raised cattle, as have my family and I, can testify that the behavior of these two milk cows was a major miracle!

¹⁴ The cows, of course, took the Ark to the perfect place because Beth-shemesh was a Levitical city. In a human sense, I can't help feeling sympathy for those two wonderful cows; it seems a terrible way to treat them after what they had done. But, of course, they were just instruments of God's miraculous sovereignty.

¹⁵ This scriptural blindness is amazing considering the fact that all the people of Beth-shemesh were priests, Levites or their families and servants, for it was a Levitical city.

Hebrew text expresses it in an unusual, confusing way; it reads "He smote in [or among] the people three score and ten men, fifty thousand men." It may mean that 70 men of Beth-shemesh were slain for looking into the Ark, and that the 50,000 figure represents a grand total, including the Philistines slain earlier for the same offense. Josephus wrote that the number slain in Beth-shemesh by the wrath of God was 70¹⁶.

12. A New Home for the Ark of the Covenant. (7:1-14)

The Ark is taken to Kirjath-jearim, where it will remain in the home of Abinadab, a priest; his son, Eleazar, is sanctified to take care of it¹⁷. Samuel preaches, the people repent and put away their idols.

The Philistines then draw near in battle array, and the Israelites, fearful, ask Samuel to pray for them. Samuel sacrifices a suckling lamb, cries unto the LORD for Israel, and the LORD responds. He sends a great thunderstorm against the Philistines, "discomfiting" (disorienting and confusing) them. The Israelites attack, pursue and defeat the Philistines. To mark the victorious event Samuel erects a memorial stone and calls it "Eben-ezer" (stone of the help).

The hand of the Lord is against the Philistines all of the days of Samuel, the Israelites regain the cities that the Philistines had captured from them, "from Ekron unto Gath," and the areas around them. The Philistines come against Israel no more, and peace prevails.

NOTES:

a. The exact location of Kirjath-jearim is unknown. It was somewhere near Mount Jearim, about nine miles west of Jerusalem, in the border land between Judah and Benjamin.

b. The period of "twenty years" in v 2 is puzzling, for the Ark remained in the house of Abinadab for perhaps 100 years (through Samuel's judgeship [approximately 45 years], Saul's reign, and well into David's reign). Perhaps the meaning is that it required 20 years before all of the House of Israel got the message and lamented (repented) before the Lord.

c. In verse 14 the word "Amorites" is something of a puzzle. They were a tribe descended from Canaan; in Abraham's time they dwelt west of the Dead Sea. Here, "Amorites" at the end of v 14, it seems to mean all of Canaan.

d. The words, "from Ekron even unto Gath," in v 14 probably means the liberation of that region of Israel--adjacent to all of northern Philistia. One can almost hear the Israelites singing "Happy Days Are Here Again."

13. Samuel's Judicial Circuit. (7:15-17)

¹⁶ Josephus, Antiquities, 6.1.4.

¹⁷ It seems that Kirjath-jearim was also called Baale (II Sam 6:2) and Baalah (I Chron 13:6).

Samuel judges Israel on a three-point circuit: Bethel in the north, Mizpah in the west, and Gilgal in the east. He makes his home in Ramah, in the center of his circuit, and builds an altar there. The exact location of this Ramah is a matter of dispute, but it was probably in northern border of Benjamin. Thus Ramah has replaced Shiloh as the spiritual capital of Israel.

NOTES:

a. The Ark, once taken from Shiloh by Hophni and Phinehas, would never return to Shiloh; and Shiloh, destroyed by the Philistines, and without the Ark and the Tabernacle, was never again a place of importance.

b. The word "Shiloh," a proper noun, is a somewhat mysterious word. The Hebrew word means "tranquil" or "peaceful"; and, although it is a place name in Israel, its primary meaning is as a title or epithet of Christ. Although the city of Shiloh faded as a place of importance after the Ark was no longer there, the significance of the name is undimmed, and has an even more brilliant future. The name will not assume its full, and eternal, divine significance "until Shiloh come," with the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy over Judah (Gen 49:10), in the return of Jesus in the Second Advent, to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

14. Samuel Repeats Eli's Failure. (8:1-3)

When Samuel is old, he makes his two sons, Joel and Abiah, judges to assist him at Beersheba, in the far south. It seems amazing, after Samuel had seen first-hand the great error of Eli, but he repeats Eli's error! His sons become corrupt and take bribes to pervert judgment; but, like Eli before him, Samuel fails to correct them.

NOTE: Interestingly, David will make this same mistake; he did not control or discipline his children. As a result, Absalom, his son, will take a matter into his own hands, leading to his rebellion against his father and great tragedy (this great and unnecessary tragedy is recorded in II Sam 13-18).

15. "Give Us a King!" (8:4-22)

In Samuel's old age, the people demand a king, so as to be like the nations around them; this is an insult to the LORD, for He has been their King (at least theoretically) since leaving Egypt¹⁸. Samuel is offended, but the LORD reminds him that He is really the one they are rejecting, and not Samuel as judge.

This is a great turning point in the history of Israel. From this time on, for the rest of their history as an independent nation, they will have kings; some will be good, some will be bad, and some will be extremely bad. Obeying the instruction of the LORD, Samuel tells the people that he will give them a king; but he warns

¹⁸ Making choices so as to be like others ("everyone else is doing it"), without considering what is right or wrong, wise or unwise, is almost always a destructive mistake. We must wonder what life for the Israelites would have been like, had they continued in the will of God as a theocracy, and what blessings they missed by demanding a king. See, in this regard, Isaiah 43:15.

the people that they will regret their choice. He tells them, in great detail, why they are making the wrong choice, telling them of all the things that a king will take from them. But the people don't care; they insist on having a king.

16. Saul, the First King, Is Chosen. (Chapter 9)

Saul, son of a wealthy man of the tribe of Benjamin named Kish, is selected by God to be king, and He directs Samuel to give him the news. Saul is described as being "a choice young man" and "goodly," and head and shoulders taller than all of the people in that city¹⁹. Saul, searching for his father's strayed asses, fails to find them. Near a city he learns that a seer (Samuel) has come to the city and decides to ask the seer where the lost asses are. As he and the servant climb the hill to the city they meet young girls coming out of the city to draw water. They tell Saul that the seer is there, and that he will be going to a hilltop to sacrifice and eat.

The LORD had told Samuel that he would meet the man He has chosen to be King of Israel. Coming to the gate of the city Saul meets Samuel and asks him where to find the seer; Samuel says that he is the seer, and tells him to come up to the high place with him. Samuel also tells Saul not to worry about the lost asses, for they have been found. Samuel tells Saul that he is chosen to be "the desire of Israel." Saul, seeming to understand what that means, demurs, saying that he is of Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes, and that his family is the least important of the tribe of Benjamin. Nevertheless, Samuel takes Saul and his servant to the feast in the high place and, among about 30 invited guests (who had already eaten), Saul and his servant were seated in the most important place. Meat and other things that had been kept for Saul were set in front of them, and Saul and his servant ate.

In the morning Samuel tells Saul and the servant to come with him. As they neared the city gate, Samuel bids Saul to send the servant on, so they can be alone; and Samuel gives Saul the LORD's message about being chosen.

17. Saul, a Different Man with a New Heart, Is Off to a Good Start. (10:1-16)

Samuel anoints Saul as king, and gives him some detailed prophecies about his immediate future. Samuel tells Saul how he will encounter a group of prophets, and says that when Saul prophesies among them, he will be "turned into another man." Samuel tells Saul to go to Gilgal and wait for him there. In obedience Saul goes, and God gives him "another heart." As Samuel prophesied, Saul meets a group of prophets and the Spirit of God comes upon him and he prophesies

¹⁹ Many commonly used expressions in the English language have their origins in the Bible. Verse 2 seems to be the origin of our expression, "head and shoulders above the rest."

among them²⁰. He is off to a good start, but when he returns home to Gibeah he keeps his anointing a secret²¹.

NOTES:

*a. The reference to "Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin" in v 2 is a bit puzzling, for Rachel, the favorite wife of Jacob, was buried between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Judah. Perhaps it refers to the border **area** between Benjamin and Judah.*

b. The "company of prophets" referred to by Samuel in v 5 is what will later be referred to as a "school of the prophets," a place where young men, selected by the Lord, received instruction in the duties of a prophet. It is highly probable that the group met by Saul was trained (or was in training) by Samuel.

c. There is much symbolism in this passage concerning the changes that took place in Saul, after his anointing by Samuel. It is an Old Covenant expression of what will be called, in the New Covenant era, the "new birth." The olive oil used to anoint under the Old Covenant is symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

18. Samuel Publicly Proclaims Saul to Be King. (10:17-27)

Samuel calls an assembly of all of Israel at Mizpah (Mizpeh), in the land of Benjamin. In a process like the one in which Achan was identified as the source of the trouble at Ai (Joshua 7), the new king is identified--first by tribe, then by family, and then the man²². Saul, still reluctant, hides; but he is found and proclaimed. The people shout, "God save the king," and a band of men whose hearts are touched follow Saul; but some are not convinced, and say so²³.

NOTES:

a. Samuel could not have gathered all of the Israelite people in that one place for, even if he did, the enormous gathering would go for miles in all directions, and speaking to them, let alone controlling them, would have been impossible. His instruction that the people of Israel gather "by your thousands" undoubtedly means representatives of each tribe; and it probably means a chosen group of leaders from each clan, within each tribe, gathered together in separate tribal groups. Otherwise, speaking to them and instructing them would have been unworkable--somewhere between extremely difficult and inefficient, and completely impossible.

²⁰ I Samuel 19:24

²¹ Gibeah, Saul's birthplace, was the scene of the horrible night-long gang rape and murder of the cowardly Levite's concubine, which led to the war in which the tribe of Benjamin was nearly annihilated in the time of the Judges (Judges 19). Saul continued to live there after becoming king.

²² Joshua 7:16-21.

²³ This seems to be the source of the traditional English blessing, "God save the king [queen]."

b. Here we have evidence for the belief that Samuel kept written records of significant events, which became one of the sources (probably the principal one) for the writing of this book, I Samuel, and an actual example of his record keeping (v 25).

19. Saving Jabesh-gilead - King Saul at His Best. (11:1-15)

The Ammonites besiege Jabesh-gilead, and the people are faced with a terrible choice: to be wiped out, or submit to blinding of the right eye and virtual slavery²⁴. They ask for seven days to decide, and send word to Saul at Gibeah. Saul comes in from his pastures, hears what has happened, and the Spirit of God comes upon him. He announces a general mobilization, reaches Jabesh-gilead on the 7th morning and wipes out the Ammonites. The people are so grateful that they want to kill those men who despised Saul on the day he was proclaimed king (10:27); but Saul, at his gracious best, forbids it. Samuel leads the people to Gilgal where they again proclaim Saul king, with sacrifices to God and great rejoicing.

NOTE: The Ammonites were a nomadic kingdom living east of the Jordan River. They were descended from Ammon, the son of the younger daughter of Lot, conceived in incest when Lot fled the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Moabites, Ammon's sister kingdom to the south (east of the Dead Sea) were descended from Lot's older daughter. Both pagan nations were cursed, and eventually disappeared completely from history, as prophesied by Ezekiel (25:5-14) and Zephaniah (2:9-11).

20. A Rainy Wheat Harvest--to Make a Point. (12:1-25)

In the first 15 verses of Chapter 12 Samuel reminds the people of their checkered history, how the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to rescue them out of Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land. He reminds them of their apostasy and of the oppression that their sinning had always brought upon them, and how God had sent various Judges to set them free. Now, he says, they have demanded and received a king; if they and their king obey the Lord they shall do well. If, however, they rebel and turn from the Lord, they will suffer as before.

Then, to make his point with impact, he tells them that he is going to ask the LORD to send thunder and rain, on their ripe wheat, as a final statement about the sin of their demanding a king. And the LORD does send a thunderstorm and rain on the ripe wheat, and the people greatly fear the LORD and Samuel.

Then Samuel says that they have nothing to fear (if they are obedient), that the LORD has preserved them for his great name's sake, and that he (Samuel) will

²⁴ This is the same town where the other Israelites, in the time of the Judges, slaughtered the men and took 400 virgins to provide wives for the nearly extinct Benjamites. By Saul's time the town has been repopulated, and these besieged Gileadites must have many relatives in Benjamin, where Saul is living. In fact, Saul himself could have been related to some in Jabesh-Gilead, through one of the 400 captured maidens, generations before him.

continue to pray for them (a beautiful illustration of the heart of Samuel and his love for the disobedient Israelites). But, he again says, if they and their king are wicked, both they and their king will be “consumed” (destroyed). And, we may assume, the point having been made, the rain stopped, the Sun came out, dried the wheat, stood it up where it had been blown down, and the harvest was a miraculous success.

NOTES:

a. The expression, "the Lord's Anointed," is a reference to the Christ, the third Person of the Trinity. It occurs only five times in the Bible, all in the Old Testament: I Sam 2:35, 12:3 and 5; Ps 2:2; and Hab 3:13. The English word "Christ" is translated from the Greek "Christos," meaning "(God's) Anointed."

b. The thing that a wheat farmer most dreads when the wheat is ripe and dry is a thunderstorm. The wind blows the wheat down making it difficult (sometimes impossible) to mow, and the rain soaks the dry wheat and can ruin it with mold.

A thunderstorm at the time of wheat harvest was almost unheard of; this one was clearly supernatural. As was the case in the Book of Judges, we are not told that the ruined wheat was miraculously restored as it was before the storm; but the implication is clear that it was. Samuel and the LORD didn't want to ruin the people's wheat crop; they just wanted to get their attention.

21. The Beginning of the End for Saul. (13:1-23)

After only two years as king, Saul's tendency to presumption gets him in serious trouble. Jonathan, with a small force, wins a victory over the Philistine garrison at Geba; it would seem that Jonathan's victory was supernatural. As a result, the Philistines gather an enormous army against Saul. The Israelite men flee in all directions to hide; some cross over the Jordan into Giliad and the tribe of Gad to escape the Philistines. Faced with annihilation by the huge Philistine army of 30,000 iron chariots, 6,000 horsemen and innumerable foot soldiers, Saul is told to wait seven days with his small army in Gilgal for Samuel to arrive.

On the 7th day Saul runs out of patience. Frantic for help from the Lord, he presumptuously, sinfully, acts as his own priest and offers sacrifices to the Lord. As he is finishing his illicit sacrifices, Samuel arrives, rebukes him for taking such a matter into his own hands, and prophesies: Saul's kingdom will end, for God seeks a king "after His own heart"; and Samuel departs²⁵.

Saul and Jonathan, with only 600 men, wait in Gibeah. Out of the enormous Philistine army come three parties of "spoilers (reconnoitering raiders), probing in different directions, seeking Saul's tiny army, in which only Saul and Jonathan had swords! In his presumption, Saul has thrown a rock into a hornet's nest!

²⁵ God will find that king "after his own heart" in David.

And, worse, he has offended the LORD God by offering illicit sacrifices. The outlook is grim.

NOTES:

a. Verse 1 is a problem because the complete numbers are missing in the Hebrew text. It actually reads "Saul was [blank] years old when he began to reign and he reigned [blank] and two years over Israel." Translators have used various ways to supply the missing numbers, and the Septuagint omits the verse completely! Perhaps the best composite of various attempts to supply the missing numbers is that "Saul was 35-40 years when he began to reign; and when he had reigned two years over Israel" (followed by v 2)²⁶.

See also in this regard Paul's narrative of the history of Israel in Acts 13, v 21.
b. It is clear from the wording of vv 1, 7, and 19-23 that southern Israel, west of the Jordan River, was conquered and occupied by the Philistines, who posted scattered outposts (garrisons) to control the Israelite people. In all of that area, only Saul and Jonathan had swords; no one else had either swords or spears; the Philistines did not allow it. All that the Israelites had as weapons were farming tools, and the Israelites were not allowed to have their own blacksmiths ("Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears"). When their farming implements needed to be sharpened, the Israelites had to take them to Philistine smiths for sharpening. The Israelites were in complete, disarmed, subjugation.

22. Jonathan's Amazing Faith and Courage. (14:1-23)

Faced with the huge army of the Philistines, and in spite of the fact that the small Israelite army isn't even armed with swords, Jonathan is inspired to attack, trusting in the Lord for the victory. He and his armor bearer, alone and with only one sword, climb up a steep, rocky crag and slaughter the arrogant Philistine garrison (about 20 men) on the hill top.

Supernaturally, there is an earthquake below, and the men of the mighty Philistine army begin to kill one another. Saul sees that the Philistines are falling and fleeing, and he attacks. The Israelites who have been hiding in the hills and caves take heart and join in pursuing the Philistines, and Saul is handed the victory in a battle he hasn't even fought ("the LORD saved Israel that day," verse 23).

NOTES:

a. Although the fact is not clearly stated, it is apparent that by this time the entire area was under Philistine domination and military occupation. The Israelites had not been allowed to possess swords, spears or other weapons of iron, and Israelite blacksmiths had not been allowed to practice their trade. There were only two men in the Israelite army armed with swords: King Saul and Jonathan. We are

²⁶ See Henry M. Morris, *The New Defender's Study Bible*, p 456, Note on I Samuel 13:1.

not told how Jonathan's armor bearer became armed; perhaps he picked up the sword of the first dead Philistine on the hill top.

b. An interesting fact about this battle, and one that is almost not mentioned, is revealed in v 21. It is that "Hebrews...from the country round about," who apparently were part of the Philistine army, changed sides when they saw the Philistines fleeing, and joined Saul's little army in the pursuit. Perhaps they were afraid not to join the Philistines; or perhaps they hated King Saul over some previous grievance. We are not told; but the author differentiates them from Saul's Israelites by calling them "the Hebrews."

23. Saul Begins to Come Apart. (14:24-46)

Saul, excited and not seeking guidance from the Lord, wants to maximize "his" victory. He issues an order that no one is to stop to eat, but all must continue to pursue and kill the enemy. He pronounces the death penalty on anyone who eats anything, but there is a problem: not everyone received notice of the order.

Unaware of the order Jonathan, exhausted and hungry, takes some wild honey with the end of his rod, eats it and is refreshed (his eyes became bright). He urges those around him to eat some of the honey and they tell Jonathan of Saul's order, and Jonathan replies "My father hath troubled the land." And he says to those around him that if the Israelite soldiers had been allowed to eat, their victory would have been much greater.

At the end of the day, when the order not to eat has expired, some of the Israelites are so hungry that they slaughter sheep, oxen and calves and eat them (apparently raw) without bleeding them, a serious sin. Told of this, Saul orders the men to bring animals to him, he has them bled and cooked. The Israelites eat, and Saul erects a monument to the Lord in memory of the great victory.

When Saul finally does seek guidance, the Lord won't speak to him; frustrated, he casts lots to learn who is responsible²⁷. When he learns what Jonathan had done, although it was nothing compared with what many Israelites had done in eating raw meat with the blood, he decrees Jonathan's execution. The people, seeing the injustice of killing the great hero of the battle, rise up and refuse to allow it. In the face of popular opinion, Saul backs down.

With this great victory Saul is accepted as king over all of Israel and fights against all of the pagans around Israel; but he is beginning to come apart.

24. To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice. (15:1-23)

Samuel gives Saul specific instructions for attacking the Amalekites: they are to be utterly destroyed--no prisoners and no loot. Saul spares the Kenites, who had

²⁷ Exactly what happened here in the casting of lots is unclear; but it seems that the Lord controlled the event so as to give Saul the true answer to his question.

been kind to Moses and the Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt²⁸. The Kenites leave the area of the battle, Saul attacks the Amalekites, defeats them and the people "fly upon the spoil." Saul almost obeys the LORD's commandment--but not quite. He keeps Agag, the King of Amalek, as a trophy prisoner, and allows the people to keep the best of the livestock²⁹. When confronted by Samuel, Saul lies at first; but when Samuel confronts him with his lie, Saul blames it on the people. Samuel rebukes Saul in one of the most often-quoted passages of Scripture (verses 22-23), and tells him it is all over³⁰.

25. The Fear of Man: It's All Over for Saul. (15:24-35)

Saul finally admits his sin, and says he did it because he was afraid to offend the people. Samuel calls for Agag and Agag pleads for his life. Samuel explains the situation: "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women"; and he not only kills Agag himself, but he "hewed him in pieces" and he does this "before the LORD." There is symbolism here--primarily of the just nature of the LORD--but also of the deadly nature of the fear of man, which "bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). It is also a lesson in spiritual fundamentals for Saul; but it is too late for this; it is all over for this deeply flawed king. Without preamble Samuel leaves, never to see Saul again; yet he grieves for him. Samuel grieves for Saul because he loves him, weaknesses and all; and perhaps he grieves for what Saul might have been.

NOTES:

*a. Twice in Chapter 15 Saul refers to the Lord as "the LORD **thy** [Samuel's] God" (15:15,30). It appears that Saul never developed his own relationship with the Lord, which may explain his failure as king.*

b. In telling Saul that the decision to replace him as king is final, Samuel uses a title for God, "the Strength of Israel" (v 29), which occurs nowhere else in the Bible. This title is also a fundamental fact of life: that it is the power of God that brought the Israelites success--not their strength, numbers, or wealth. It is a lesson they never learned; and it is a lesson that the modern nation of Israel has never even considered.

26. Two Spirits and a New King. (16:1-14)

The Lord sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint the next king from among the children of Jesse. To everyone's surprise (including Samuel's) the youngest, David, is chosen. Samuel anoints David with oil and the Spirit of God comes upon him, never to depart. At the same time, the Spirit of God departs from Saul

²⁸ The Kenites, nomadic descendants of Midian, were skilled metal smiths. They had been helpful to the Israelites in the past, and Saul gave them an opportunity to escape from what would be the battlefield.

²⁹ Agag is probably a title (such as "Pharaoh") and not a proper noun. See in this regard Nu 24:7.

³⁰ See in this regard I Chronicles 10:13-14.

and an evil spirit begins to trouble him; except for brief periods of peace when David plays the harp for him, this evil spirit will henceforth never leave Saul, and will torment him.

NOTES:

a. David was, in many ways, a type of Christ. It is interesting that, when chosen to be the next king, David was watching over his flock of sheep in the pastures outside of Bethlehem. These were the same pastures where, 1,000 years later, the Shepherds were watching over their flocks when the angels came to announce the birth of the Messiah, the infant King of Kings, in Bethlehem.

b. Some theologians cannot accept the idea that our LORD would use an evil spirit in this way, but the wording seems clear. It simply means that the Lord allowed the evil spirit to do what Saul had, in some way, brought upon himself; He seems to have done the same thing at least one other time, to punish wicked Abimelech (Judges 9:23).

c. In the last 13 words of v 7 there is expressed an extremely important principle, both in spiritual life and in secular life. We are to follow God's example; He judges men, not by their outward appearance, but by what is in their hearts. Even in secular life we should not allow ourselves to be taken in by one's looks and words; we must instead endeavor to learn what he is really like in the inward man--i.e. the heart--his true nature.

27. David Becomes Saul's Therapist and Armor-Bearer. (16:15-23)

Interestingly, Saul's servants realize that it is an evil spirit that is troubling Saul; they also know in some way that harp music will give the king relief. One of them recommends young David, who has already earned a reputation for his courage, and he becomes Saul's therapist; when David plays the harp, the evil spirit departs for a time and Saul has peace³¹. Saul comes to love David greatly and, later on, David will also be Saul's trusted armor-bearer.

28. A Giant Challenges Israel. (17:1-16)

The Philistines mobilize against Israel, Saul likewise mobilizes, and the two armies encamp on opposing ridges with the Valley of Elah between them³². Instead of a general attack by the Philistines, they send a giant, Goliath of Gath, down into the valley to challenge and insult the Israelites. He is 9 Feet 9 Inches tall, is clothed in appropriately huge armor, carries a huge spear, and the Israelites -including Saul-- are terrified³³. Each day, Goliath comes down into the valley

³¹ Among his other virtues, David was gifted as a musician and as "the sweet psalmist [singer] of Israel" (II Samuel 23:1).

³² The Valley of Elah is about 11 miles SW of Jerusalem, named for its evergreen trees.

³³ Saul was a man of doubtful courage. We are about to see the contrast between frightened Saul, a very large man from whom the Spirit of God has departed, and young David, a courageous adolescent, anointed by the LORD.



And David...smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

I Samuel 17:49

and challenges Israel to send a man to meet him: if any one Israelite can kill him he says, the Philistines will become slaves to Israel, and vice versa. For 40 days, he repeats the challenge, but no Israelite dares to fight him.

NOTES:

a. I cannot think of this episode in Israel's history without thinking of a huge Chinese soldier at the end of the Korean War. He was apparently a pituitary giant, about eight feet tall, and the Marines called him "The Mongolian." He would stand on top of a high hill in the Chinese lines, making threatening gestures and shouting insults at the Marines. He, of course, couldn't come over to us--he was just a psychological weapon, put on display. And we, of course, couldn't get to him. We watched each other through artillery forward observers' telescopes. In return I would gather my under-strength platoon on the highest part of our outpost hill, where we energetically returned the insulting words and gestures. I'm sure that we didn't impress the Mongolian, but it made us feel better.

b. We must wonder why this insulting display went on for so long; 40 days is a long time to stay in camp with nothing to do while the gigantic Philistine insults the Israelites, and the Israelites absorbs the humiliation. Perhaps it was the plan of God, to prepare the Philistines for panic and defeat when Goliath was killed, within the first moments, by a boy armed only with a sling. Also, 40 is a significant number; Jesus fasted for 40 days before his great confrontation with Satan (Luke 4:1-13). Again, we are left to wonder.

29. Who Will Face Goliath? (17:17-37)

Three of Jesse's sons had been taken as soldiers, and David, their little brother, is sent to take food to them (and to their commander)³⁴. David, greeted with insults from his brothers, sees Goliath and, instead of being intimidated, he is infuriated. He asks, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" "Little David" volunteers to fight the giant.

Saul, of course, scoffs at the suggestion (and with reason); but David tells him that, in protecting his sheep, he has killed both a bear and a lion, and he killed both (with only his shepherd's staff and his hands) and rescued the lambs. David is offended by the arrogance of Goliath and he declares with confidence that it was the LORD who gave him the strength to kill the lion and the bear, and that He will give him the strength to kill Goliath. Saul is convinced and accepts David's offer.

30. David vs Goliath--The Fight of the Ages. (17:38-58)

Saul offers his armor and sword to David, but David takes only his shepherd's staff, a sling, and five water-smoothed stones, and goes forward to meet Goliath.

³⁴ David has apparently left Saul's palace where he was Saul's armor-bearer and played the harp, returned to his father, and some time has passed.

Goliath is insulted that only a shepherd boy is sent to fight him, and curses David; but his chagrin doesn't last long. David predicts the outcome and charges, and slings a stone into Goliath's forehead with such force that it penetrates the skull; the giant falls on his face, unconscious (or dead). David then stands on Goliath, draws the giant's sword from its scabbard and, as he had declared in his brief exchange with Goliath, uses it to cut off his head³⁵. Seeing this, the Philistines flee in terrified disorder, and the Israelites pursue and kill them. Returning to the abandoned Philistine camp, the Israelites "spoiled their tents" (took all of their valuable possessions).

Abner, Saul's general, brings David, carrying Goliath's head, before Saul. Saul, curiously, does not recognize David and asks who his father is; David replies respectfully that he is the son of Jesse of Bethlehem.

David takes Goliath's head to Jerusalem as a trophy; but he keeps the giant's armor and sword.

Saul is handed a great victory; yet he fails to see that it was the LORD of hosts who conquered the enemy, not David, Saul, or the Israelite army.

NOTES:

a. There appears to be a chronology problem here; but is there? When Saul sees David kill Goliath, he asks Abner, "Whose son is this youth³⁶?" Yet, in the previous chapter there is the account of David's becoming Saul's musician-therapist and his armor-bearer, both very close relationships; and the account in Chapt 16 makes it clear that Saul was very fond of David at that time. The explanation seems to be that David had previously left Saul's court, at an unknown time in the past (it could not have been more than two or three years), and had gone back home to tend his father's sheep (see 17:15). Saul, probably because of his severe mental illness, did not remember David and his former positions; and, if he remembered him at all, he would not have expected an adolescent musician to be his warrior champion.

b. In pleading his case for being allowed to fight Goliath, David tells King Saul that, as a shepherd, he had killed a lion and a bear which had taken a lamb from his flock. David tells how he had followed "him" (the lion); finding the lion, David says that he "smote him [apparently with his staff]" and delivered the lamb out of the lion's mouth. Apparently, being struck on the head with the staff, the

³⁵ Part of the miracle the Lord performed that day was David's supernatural strength. In his own strength, David would have had great difficulty in lifting Goliath's huge sword to behead him. In like manner, David could not previously have killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands in his natural strength (vv 34-37).

³⁶ The Hebrew word rendered "youth" here is *naar* meaning a boy, or a child from birth to adolescence. Some critical commentators insist that David must have been a grown man and a seasoned warrior to be able to kill Goliath, thus undermining the miraculous aspect of the event. Still others relegate the entire episode to myth. But the Hebrew, in the context of Chaps 16-17, makes it clear that David was a youth, perhaps 13--15 years old.

lion dropped the lamb, and turned on David. Then, he says, the lion attacked him and, grabbing the lion by his beard with one hand, he (with supernatural strength) killed the lion.

The killing of the bear and the lion were obviously separate events, for bears and lions don't cooperate in feeding. It is from David's battle with the lion that we get the expression, "bearding the lion" (17:35).

c. As we shall see in Chaps 21 and 22, David's keeping Goliath's sword will play a role on one of the most evil acts of mass murder in the Bible.

31. Back in the Palace: Friendship and a Jealous King. (18:1-11)

After the victory over Goliath, David moves back into the palace and is made commander of Saul's army. A beautiful friendship develops between David and Jonathan, Saul's son, and the outlook seems fine; however, although David is modest and discreet, his popularity with the people makes Saul jealous (he is especially offended by their song about David's exploits in battle). On two occasions, when the evil spirit torments Saul and David is sent to play the harp to calm him, Saul hurls a javelin at David to kill him; but, each time, David dodges the deadly missile. Saul is coming completely apart.

32. A Wife for David and a Strange Dowry. (18:12-30)

Saul, still more jealous of David, removes him from the court and demotes him to captain over 1,000 men. Because David lives wisely and honorably, and the LORD is with him, Saul fears and hates David even more; but because David lives openly and righteously before them, the people love him.

Saul offers David his older daughter, Merab, as a wife; but he then gives her to another man³⁷. Wanting David dead, but anxious that his death appear to be someone else's fault, Saul offers David his younger daughter, Michal, as a wife, but requires a strange dowry. Expecting (and hoping) that David will be killed in the attempt, Saul requires that David kill 100 Philistines, circumcise them, and bring Saul their foreskins as a dowry. David returns with **twice** the required number and marries Michal, apparently unaware that Saul wants him dead. David is loved by Michal, and loved and admired by the people; but this just makes the problem of Saul's paranoid jealousy worse.

33. David Flees to Samuel. (Chapter 19)

Saul orders his servants, and even Jonathan, to kill David, but Jonathan convinces him (temporarily) that it would be a sinful mistake. David continues to serve Saul, but the jealousy consumes Saul and he again tries unsuccessfully to skewer David with his javelin as he plays the harp. Saul again orders David to be

³⁷ This is reminiscent of what a Philistine had done to Samson (Judges 14); perhaps Saul hoped this betrayal would make David angry enough to make a fatal mistake or just go away. If so, it didn't work.

killed, Michal helps him escape, and he flees to Samuel³⁸. Word reaches Saul that David and Samuel are in Ramah, and one of the strangest miracles of preservation in all of the Bible protects David from being murdered (and, perhaps, even Samuel would have been murdered, for by this time Saul is completely insane). The killers sent to get David arrive, but the Holy Spirit comes upon them and all they can do is prophesy! Saul sends a second group, but the same thing happens. Finally he goes himself and he also is stopped by the invisible, overwhelming Presence of the Spirit of God; the king humbles himself by stripping off his regal garments, he falls prostrate on the ground before Samuel and prophesies, all day and all night, in surrender to the power of God³⁹! One would think that, sooner or later, Saul would get the message and repent; but he never does.

NOTE: The text says (v 24) says that Saul “lay down naked” all that day and night; but this is probably not to be taken literally, for public nakedness was a serious offense against God. Merely to remove his outer, regal, garments, and prostrate himself in his undergarments, would be extremely humbling for a king.

David will later be rebuked by his wife, Michal, for “uncovering” himself, shamelessly, “in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself.” One would think, on the basis of these words only, that David was dancing before the Lord naked. Yet the passage (II Samuel 6:14-23) makes it clear that he was clad in his priestly ephod (and, undoubtedly, in an undergarment) for David, a type of Christ, was both priest and king.

34. A Clandestine Meeting with Jonathan. (20:1-10)

David knows now that he is in extreme danger of losing his life to Saul's madness (“there is but a step between me and death”). He arranges for a clandestine meeting with Jonathan to discuss the problem. It is the time of the new moon, a time when Saul celebrates certain feast days, and David, as a member of the court, would normally be required to be present. To attend, he now knows, would almost certainly result in his death, so he remains in hiding. David's absence from the feast days will certainly be missed, so a plan is needed. When Saul notices David's absence, Jonathan will tell him that David needed to go to Bethlehem for a yearly sacrifice. Saul's response to this will reveal whether David is, or is not, in danger.

³⁸ By this time Saul's insane desire to have David killed is so great that, believing David to be helplessly sick in bed, he orders that David, bed and all, be brought to him so that he can kill David himself. Saul's murderous madness now has no limits!

³⁹ This incident is reminiscent of the experience of Balaam, the backslid, mercenary prophet at the end of the Exodus, who was paid to curse the Israelites, but could only bless them Numbers 23. Perhaps it is true that, once one is yielded and committed as a servant of God, there always remains a remnant of susceptibility to the wooing, motivating power of the Holy Spirit.

35. A Covenant and a Signal. (20:11-23)

While David hides from Saul in Ramah, Jonathan comes to him to discuss the problem of Saul's insane hatred of David. They enter into a covenant of friendship, to include Jonathan's children, and agree upon a signal concerning Saul's attitude⁴⁰. Jonathan will return with a servant to recover his arrows, and shoot arrows toward David's hiding place; if they go beyond David, it will mean that David cannot return to the palace; but if the arrows fall short, David will know that it will be safe to return.

36. There Is No Returning for David. (20:24-42)

David's absence from Saul's table at a feast is noticed, and on the second day of the feast Saul enquires of Jonathan about David's absence. Saul erupts in fury at Jonathan and even tries to kill him with a javelin, as he had tried to kill David! Jonathan then knows that there can be no reconciliation; he goes to the place where David is hiding, and fires the arrows beyond him. With the message made clear, Jonathan hands his bow and arrows to his servant, and sends him back to the palace⁴¹. Alone, David and Jonathan repeat their covenant promise of eternal friendship, including their children, and David is on the run, alone⁴².

37. David Flees to Ahimelech for Help. (21:1-9)

David, hungry and unarmed, goes to Ahimelech the priest at Nob. Ahimelech is suspicious because David is alone, but David lies to him (we must remember that no one is perfect) and obtains the previous day's shewbread to eat, and Goliath's sword for a weapon. This innocent kindness by Ahimelech will soon cost him his life and lead to a notorious slaughter, for it is observed by Doeg, an evil Edomite and Saul's chief herdsman.

***NOTE:** It appears that by this time the Tabernacle, and what remained of its sacred furnishings, had been moved to Nob. It was a Levitical city of Benjamin; the exact location of Nob is unknown, but it seems to have been on a high hill near Jerusalem. Jerome wrote that, in his day (340-420 AD), there was nothing of its remains to indicate where it had been; it was simply gone without a trace⁴³. It is mentioned only two other times in the Bible (Neh 11:32; Is 10:32). Meanwhile, the Ark of the Covenant remained at Kirjath-jearim, in the home of Abinadab, where it had been kept and cared for, from the time of its recovery from the Philistines until it was later removed to Jerusalem by David (II Sam 6).*

⁴⁰ David will honor this promise by protecting and enriching Jonathan's crippled son, after Saul and Jonathan are killed.

⁴¹ The Hebrew word rendered "artillery" in the AV is *keliy* and it appears nowhere else in the Bible. It has a wide range of meanings, including utensil, implement, armor and weapon. Here, it refers to Jonathan's weapons; why the AV translators chose to render it "artillery" is unclear. Jonathan meant his bow and arrows.

⁴² David will keep his promise, after Saul and Jonathan are dead, and he becomes king.

⁴³ Merrill Unger: *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "Nob," p 798.

38. David Plays the Madman. (21:10-15)

Apparently fearing that there is no other place where Saul won't find him, David flees to Gath, hometown of the late giant, Goliath. It seems to be a strange place to go for safety, especially when carrying Goliath's sword, but thence he definitely goes. The Philistines recognize him as Saul's Captain of the Host and take him to Achish, the king of Gath; but David pretends to be insane. In fear he scribbles strange markings on the gate while deliberately drooling on his beard, and the disgusted king sends him away. It seems that this was not one of David's good ideas.

NOTE: It seems strange that David would go to Gath for protection, especially wearing Goliath's recognizable sword. It also seems strange that, having convinced the Philistines that he was insane, that they did not take his sword before sending him away. Perhaps David had hidden the sword before going to Gath; or perhaps it was simply supernatural protection by the LORD. We are not told.

39. A Stronghold for David at the Cave Adullam. (22:1-4)

David leaves the Philistines and sets up a stronghold hideout in a large cave near Adullam, southwest of Jerusalem in Judah⁴⁴. His family also flees to this place, apparently because they know that Saul, completely mad, would probably take out his hatred of David by having them all killed. Word gets around, other fugitives of various kinds congregate there, and David soon has a small army of about 400 such men at his cave, plus their families. Not satisfied that his parents will be safe there, should he and his little army be away or be defeated, David persuades the King of Moab to take them in.

40. Saul's Unthinkable Slaughter of the Priests and Innocent Citizens of Nob. (22:5-23)

The prophet Gad advises David to move to the forest of Hareth (Hereth), and word reaches Saul at Gibeah. Saul rails at those about him, accusing them of conspiring with David; then Doeg, the evil Edomite, tells Saul that Ahimelech the priest had given David bread and Goliath's sword. Saul demands that Ahimelech and "all his father's house" report to him and they come, 85 of them, all priests "that did wear the linen ephod." Saul accuses them wrongly of conspiring against him, and Ahimelech responds truthfully that he is innocent; but Saul insanely orders his bodyguards to kill them all. The bodyguards, who seem to fear God more than they fear Saul, refuse to harm the priests of God. So evil Doeg gladly does the unthinkable dirty work, killing 85 of them; and then goes to Nob where he

⁴⁴ The exact location of the cave Adullam is unknown today.

slaughters the innocent citizens, and their livestock, completely⁴⁵. One priest, Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech, escapes the slaughter and flees to David, who accepts the responsibility for the horrible tragedy and takes Abiathar in to protect him.

41. David Liberates Ungrateful Keilah. (23:1-15)

The Philistines are killing the inhabitants of Keilah, a walled city in the plains of Judah, at their threshing floors and robbing them of their harvested grain. The people of Keilah send word to David, asking him to come and deal with the Philistines. Instructed by the Lord, David's little army defeats the Philistines and liberates Keilah. Saul hears of it, plans to capture David there, and word of this gets back to David. David again goes before the Lord, Who tells him that if he stays there the men of Keilah will betray him to Saul (what an ungrateful bunch of creeps!). David leaves and again takes to the wilderness, constantly pursued by Saul. One of the most interesting things about this episode is that David apparently put on the ephod of Abiathar the priest to consult the Lord, which was a capital offense; yet the Lord approved, and David is again a type of Christ as both King and Priest.

42. David Spares Saul's Life. (23:29-24:22)

Saul continues to pursue David to kill him, and David flees to En-gedi, a well-watered place with trees, pasture and wild goats on the west shore of the Dead Sea. Saul enters a cave entrance to "cover his feet" and rest, not knowing that David and his men had already occupied the cave; Saul's guards apparently wait outside the cave, thinking that they are keeping Saul safe. Saul is asleep and defenseless (perhaps supernaturally asleep), but David refuses to kill him. Instead, he cuts off a portion of Saul's garment to make the point that he could have killed him, thus proving that he means Saul no harm. Saul acknowledges the wrongness of what he is doing but, as Dr. Halley puts it, "Saul acknowledged being a fool, but kept on being one." Today Saul would be diagnosed as severely schizophrenic; I would call him severely demonized, and it definitely brought out the worst in Saul's deeply flawed character.

NOTES:

a. The phrase "to cover his feet" here is somewhat difficult. It may mean that Saul went into the cave for privacy to relieve himself, and it may mean that he went into the cool cave for a nap. Most modern versions assume the former meaning, for a modern man must drop his trousers, thus "cover his feet" to relieve himself; yet Saul didn't wear trousers--he wore robes, so here the modern versions have a

⁴⁵ This is perhaps the most irrational, cruel, massacre in Hebrew history. The slaughter of the innocents by Herod (Matt 2:16) was no less cruel, but Herod at least had a reason for what he did (it was a wicked reason, but still a reason).

problem. The really significant problem with the modern rendering, however, is that it doesn't explain how David could have approached Saul and cut off a portion of his robe without Saul's knowing it. For this, it seems that Saul would have had to be asleep; and it would be unlikely that Saul would have chosen to do both in the same place. The AV (KJV) and other early English versions simply translate it as it is written, "to cover his feet," and leave the interpretation to the reader.

b. In the last verse of the passage (24:22) we are told a great deal in a few words. Even though David has sworn loyalty to Saul, and proved it by his actions, and Saul has confessed that it has been he who is wrong, David does not go back to the palace with the (temporarily) repentant Saul; instead he and his men return to their place of safety in the wilderness. David was honorable and faithful to Saul; but he was not a fool.

43. The End of an Era: Samuel Dies. (25:1)

Samuel dies at about age 98, is mourned by all Israel, and buried at his home in Ramah. He was the last of the Judges of Israel, and a key figure in the transition to the government by Kings, which will continue to the end of the era with the carrying away of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria, and the final carrying away of the Southern Kingdom into captivity by Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Oddly, the death and burial of this man, so loved and so mightily used by God, and such a giant in the history of Israel, is dismissed with only one verse.

With Samuel's death the last restraining influence on Saul is removed, and the stage is set for Saul's final self-destruction⁴⁶.

***NOTE:** We must wonder why the death of Samuel, the last, and perhaps the best, of the Judges of Israel, gets only one verse! With the Holy Spirit's having left Saul, and an evil spirit freed by God to Torment him (17:14), Samuel was the last godly influence on Saul, and his death was truly the end of an era. And yet the death and burial of this great and wise man, uniquely a Nazarite from conception, a priest, prophet, and the last Judge of Israel, gets only one verse in Jewish history (plus a passing reference to it in 28:3). The ways of God are often beyond our understanding; this one, at least for me, is definitely one of them.*

44. Nabal and Abigail: David Finds a Wife. (25:2-42)

David, in need of food for his men, sends a delegation to an extremely wealthy man, Nabal the Carmelite⁴⁷. This is a reasonable request, for David's men had protected Nabal's sheep and shepherds while they were in remote pastureland; yet

⁴⁶ Samuel's death and its impact on the life of King Saul are referred to in I Sam 28:3. Without Samuel's positive influence and guidance, without the Holy Spirit, and with an evil spirit confusing and misguiding him, Saul is on the way to his ignoble death and post mortem humiliation.

Nabal, who must have had a severe personality defect, not only refuses, but goes out of his way to be insulting⁴⁸. With David and 400 of his men, offended and on their way to kill Nabal and take what they need, word reaches Nabal's wife, Abigail. This wise and gracious woman hurries out to meet David with lots of food and wine and falls at his feet with conciliatory words. David accepts her gifts and conciliatory words, tells her to return to her home in peace, and he returns with his soldiers to their camp. Upon hearing what his wife has done, Nabal apparently has a massive stroke, struck down by the Lord, and dies 10 days later. Hearing of this, David sends for Abigail and she becomes his wife; David knew a winner when he found one.

45. A Wife Gained and a Wife Lost. (25:43-44)

At the same time as the affair with Nabal and Abigail, David also takes as his wife Ahinoam, a woman of Jezreel; she will become the mother of David's eldest son, Amnon⁴⁹. During this period, Saul had taken David's first wife, Michal, and given her to another man as his wife, a deliberate offense to hurt and insult David, reminiscent of the similar experience of Samson in Judges 14.

46. David Again Spares Saul's Life. (Chapter 26)

Saul again leads his army out to kill David and, for the second time, David has an opportunity to kill Saul. On this occasion God causes a supernatural sleep to come upon Saul and all his army, enabling David and Abishai to reach Saul⁵⁰. Abishai wants to kill Saul with his own spear but, like the first time (Chapter 24), David refuses to harm the king anointed by the LORD; so they take Saul's spear and cruse of water and move off to a safe distance⁵¹. Saul wakes to hear David shouting to him, recognizes David's voice and, once more, realizes that David has spared his life. And, once more, Saul admits David's innocence and his own guilt. He asks David to come back to him, but David isn't that foolish. David returns the spear and water bottle to a soldier sent by Saul, Saul returns to the palace and David returns to the wilderness.

47. David Signs On with the Philistines. (27:1-7)

A turning point in the history of Israel is reached: David now realizes that he can never be reconciled to Saul, and considers his options. Rather than continue to

⁴⁷ This Carmel is in Judah, south of Hebron; it is not the better known place of that name, Mt. Carmel, on the northern coast of the Mediterranean.

⁴⁸ Nabal's name means "foolish, stupid, wicked, a dolt"; he lived up to the meaning of his name, for he seems to have been all of those things.

⁴⁹ This son, Amnon, is the one who would later rape his half-sister Tamar and precipitate the tragic war between David and his son Absalom.

⁵⁰ Abishai was one of Israel's three great warrior generals, along with Joab and Asahel, all three the sons of Zeruah, and David's nephews.

⁵¹ The cruse was a small clay bottle with a narrow neck, allowing the carrier to drink the water, but easily plugged so as not to spill the water when walking or fighting.

live as a fugitive, he goes into Philistia, for he knows that Saul will be afraid to pursue him there. He sells the services of his little army to Achish, King of Gath, and is given the city of Ziklag, in the far south, on the Philistine border with Judah. David, his wives and his little army, live there for 16 months.

NOTES:

a. This King Achish of Philistia is the same Achish to whom David fled earlier to find protection from Saul, before he had gathered his small army. When David learned that his reputation as Saul's Captain of the Host was known to the Philistines, he feared them and escaped by pretending to be insane (21:10-15).

b. Here (v 2) we are told not only the name of King Achish, but the name of his father. This is an example of the detail in the Bible. Myths, tribal fables and spurious documents of such antiquity do not contain such details; and, so far, every such detail in the Bible has been proven accurate by archeology.

48. David Lies to King Achish, and Achish Believes Him. (27:8-12)

David goes on a campaign of slaughter against the enemies of Israel, in the border lands with Israel, from the far north (the border with Syria) to the far south (the border with Egypt). He slaughters the Geshurites, Gezrites, and the Amalekites so that no survivors can tell King Achish that he has not been fighting Israelites. He also confiscates their livestock and valuable possessions (having been slaughtered, they will not need them anymore).

When David returns to Gath in Philistia, King Achish asks him where he has been fighting. To gain the trust of Achish David lies, telling him that he has been fighting the Israelites. Achish believes David, and decides that he has made himself so hated by his own people, the Israelites, that "he shall be my servant forever." The reality is that soon David, as the king of all Israel, will conquer all of Philistia, and the Philistines who survive will be David's servants, disarmed, occupied, and paying tribute to David "forever."

But David did lie. In David's defense, he was "between a rock and a hard place" when he lied to his protector. He loved the people of Israel, for whom he had been secretly fighting; but he needed the protection for his people provided by Achish. It must have been hard for David to lie to his benefactor; but it was not one of his finer moments.

We told in I Kings 2:35-46 that at the end of David's life when he, as King of all Israel, conquered all of Philistia and reduced it to a tributary, puppet state, another Achish ("son of Maacha") was puppet king of Gath. He was probably related to this King Achish, but was not his son⁵².

49. Saul and the Witch of Endor. (Chapter 28)

⁵² See in this regard Unger, Merrill F., *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "Achish, 2. p 17.

The Philistines mobilize to attack Saul's army, and King Achish tells David that he and his army of mixed Israelites will go with the Philistines as part of their army. He has come to hold David in such high regard, and trusts him so, that Achish plans to make David his personal bodyguard in battle, saying "I will make thee keeper of mine head forever."

The Philistines mobilize for war with Israel and Saul is afraid. He seeks the Lord for guidance and comfort, but the Lord will not speak to him. In desperation, Saul asks for a woman with a familiar spirit (a psychic medium), although such occult activity is forbidden by the Law of Moses and by Saul's own decree. His troops tell him of such a woman and he goes in disguise to see her at Endor, about 12 miles away.

In perhaps the most controversial event in all of Scripture, Saul asks her to "bring me up" the spirit of Samuel, and Samuel seems to appear⁵³. Samuel first complains about being bothered by Saul, and then gives him the bad news, reminding Saul of what he had told him while he lived, that God is finished with him and will give the kingdom to David⁵⁴. He then tells Saul that the Philistines will win the battle the next day, and that Saul and his sons will be killed "and be with me." There is no other such event in the Bible

Saul is prostrated with fear and grief, and the woman urges him to eat something; but Saul refuses. His servants and the woman continue to urge him to eat and he agrees; he rises from the ground, sits on some sort of pallet, and the woman prepares a meal. He and his men eat it and return to their camp.

NOTE: Herein is probably the greatest unanswered question in Scripture: "Was it really Samuel, or was it a deceiving [evil] spirit"? Authorities disagree, some saying it was a demon, some saying it was Samuel, and some saying that we just can't know.

Arguing against its being the real spirit of Samuel is the fact that such occult practices are forbidden by God (Deut 18:9-14, et al), and it seems to contradict the inviolable separation of the living and the dead (Lk 16:26).

Arguing for its actually being the spirit of Samuel are the facts that the witch herself was amazed and afraid, and that the spirit of Samuel spoke the truth about the past, and correctly predicted the future in perfect accord with the known word of God (Deut 13:1-5). For these reasons, I am inclined to believe that it really was the spirit of Samuel; but the issue is definitely unresolved.

One interesting aspect of the remarks of Samuel (if, indeed, it was Samuel) is that, in speaking of the coming death of Saul and his sons, he rebukes Saul for

⁵³ The great commentator Matthew Henry (1662-1714) summarized Saul's fundamental error brilliantly writing, "Saul stood in awe of Samuel more than of God" (Matthew Henry's Commentaries, I Kings 18:20).

⁵⁴ I Samuel 15:26-28..

"disquieting" him, and says that upon their death they would "be with me." This supports the belief that "Sheol" was the resting place for all dead, righteous and unrighteous, under the Old Covenant, where they would await the coming of the Messiah to pay the sin debt of all of mankind, to descend into the place of the Old Testament dead, and reveal Himself as the Messiah.

50. David, Amalek and Ziklag. (Chapter 29)

The Philistine army gathers for war against Saul and David's little army brings up the rear, apparently as a reserve. The Philistine princes don't trust David, and insist that he and his army not go with them into battle. Reluctantly King Achish agrees and, heaping praise on David and assuring him that he trusts him, tells David to return to Ziklag. So David returns to Ziklag to defend the southern area against the Amalekites, and the Philistine army goes up to Jezreel to fight with Saul.

NOTES:

a. In v 1 we are told that in preparation for the battle the Israelite army encamped "by a fountain which is in Jezreel." This is not the famous Jezreel, of Ahab and Jezebel fame; rather, it was a place with plentiful water for Saul's army. Today it is known as Goliath's Fountain because it is considered to be the place where David killed Goliath.

b. We must wonder about the relationship between David and King Achish. Although David has deceived King Achish by telling him that he had been fighting the Israelites, when in fact he had been fighting the enemies of Israel, in time King Achish comes to trust and admire David more and more. There must have been something healthy going on between the two, and David must have served the king well in the interim, in order to achieve such extremely high regard in the mind of the king.

And, it seems strange to me that David would appear to be so willing to fight for the Philistines against Saul's army. Was he acting? How would he have dealt with it if he had fought for the Philistines and learned that Saul, Jonathan and two of Jonathan's brothers were killed, mutilated and hung up naked on public display? He would have been a contributor to this tragedy.

There is much here to ponder.

51. Disaster at Ziklag, Followed by Supernatural Triumph. (30:1-20)

When David returns to Ziklag he finds it pillaged, burned and empty, for the Amalekites had attacked while he and his army were away and had carried off all

the women, children and livestock⁵⁵. David's grief-stricken soldiers want to stone him and he is in grief for the loss of his own wives and children; but he knows what to do about it: he "encouraged himself in the LORD his God." He puts on the ephod of Abiathar the priest and asks the Lord for guidance; the Lord tells him to pursue the enemy and he will not only defeat them, but will recover all that they had taken⁵⁶.

David pursues the Amalekites and, along the way, 200 of his men are left behind because they are too exhausted to continue. With the remaining 400 David continues and comes upon a distressed Egyptian in great need of water and food; he says that he is a slave of one of the Amalekites, who had left him behind because he was sick. David commands that the man be given food and water and the man is greatly refreshed. David asks him if he can lead his army to the Amalekites and, assured that David will protect him, he does. David's army overtakes the Amalekites at twilight and finds them celebrating their sacking of Ziklag. David attacks immediately and kills the Amalekites all night and all of the next day. Although he is vastly outnumbered, David's small army kills them all of the enemy except for 400 young men who flee on camels and escape. And, as the Lord had promised, David recovers all the women, children, livestock and other valuables, plus the spoils of the enemy.

David and his army, with the rescued women, children and all that he has recovered, plus the spoils taken from the Amalekites, return to Ziklag picking up the 200 who had been left behind the day before⁵⁷.

NOTE: Ziklag was in the southern-most part of Israel, near the Egyptian border, in the Negev desert. The soil transitions from loamy to the sands of the desert. Soldiers mounted on camels would be a deadly force, comparable to a fast-moving cavalry unit mounted on horses. It is evidence of the supernatural nature of David's victory that 400 Amalekites, mounted on camels, the same number of men as David's entire force, with the advantage of being mounted, "escaped" from David's victorious little army. They fled for their lives!

52. David Acts with Amazing Grace. (30:21-31)

⁵⁵ These Amalekites are the same ones God had commanded Saul to "utterly destroy"; had Saul obeyed God in the earlier battle, this disaster could not have happened (I Samuel 15:3).

⁵⁶ Here again David assumes the role of priest, something that has, and will, cost other men their lives, in spite of the fact that he had an actual priest, Abiathar, with him; yet the Lord approves. In this way David is again symbolic of the coming Christ, for he functions as both king and priest, and with God's blessing.

⁵⁷ In an example of the fascinating detail often found in the Old Testament, we are told that the enemy was wiped out "save 400 young men which rode upon camels and fled." The number of the enemy who escaped was equal to David's entire force, and they were mounted! When God is for us, our numbers, either great or small, really don't matter, nor do our weapons and equipment.

In perhaps another foreshadowing of Christ, David acts with amazing grace in dividing the spoils taken from the Amalekites (for David's men returned with a great deal more than had been taken from them). Although 1/3 of David's little army had been too weak and weary to participate in the battle, David insists that they receive an equal share. They had not earned it and did not deserve it; in fact, those who had done the fighting wanted to banish them from the group and send them away. Yet David forgives them, keeps them, and gives them an equal share. This is not natural; it is not even reasonable. Rather, it is grace, a New Testament concept unknown at the time. The compiler of the record wrote here that this policy for equal sharing of the spoils of battle became a law in Israel and continued so "unto this day" (the time of the writing of I Samuel).

David also sent part of the spoils taken to those Israelites round about who had helped him when he was fleeing from Saul. David never forgot those who had helped him; it was one of his better traits.

53. The Death of Saul and Jonathan. (Chapter 31)

While David is away, dealing with the Amalekites, the Philistines attack Saul's army and the Israelites are slaughtered. Jonathan and 2 of his brothers are killed, and Saul is wounded by arrows⁵⁸. The battle is lost, and Saul asks his armor bearer to kill him, but the man refuses; so Saul commits suicide by falling on his sword. The victorious Philistines cut off Saul's head, send it on a tour so their people can see it, put his bloody armor in their pagan temple, and hang his naked, headless body, plus the bodies of his sons, on the wall at Beth-shan.

When the men of Jabesh-gilead, whom Saul had earlier rescued from the cruel Ammonites (Chapter 11), hear of this they go to Beth-shan, recover the mutilated bodies, and take them back to Gilead. There they burn them, and give their ashes and bones an honorable burial. And, with this, the momentous era of the Judges, and of Eli and Samuel, the last two judges, is ended.

NOTES:

a. Again, in the final three verses of I Samuel, we are told a great deal about important events in very few words, and are left wondering about things left unsaid. All we are told about the recovery of the bodies of Saul and three of his sons is that the "valiant men" of Jabesh-giliad recovered the bodies of Saul and his sons, took them to an appropriate place, burned them and buried the ashes and bones in an appropriate way and place. The obvious question is, did they have to fight to recapture the bodies from Beth-shan? And, if not, why not? I find no other commentator who raises this question. The fact that it was accomplished at

⁵⁸ Saul's other son, Ishbosheth, was obviously not involved in this battle and so, as we shall see, survived (II Sam 2:8-10).

night may explain it. Perhaps the men of Bethshan, knowing that Saul and his sons were dead, and that his soldiers were dead or fleeing, there was no reason to be on watch; they were probably celebrating or asleep. At any rate, it was an admirable and courageous thing for the men of Jabesh-giliad to do.

b. Beth-shan was a fortress city 4 miles west of the Jordan River and 12 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. In the region of the tribe of Manasseh, it was never fully conquered by Joshua and remained populated by Canaanites; it was something of a powerful Canaanite colony, surrounded by Israelites. At the time of the killing of Saul and his sons it was either conquered by Philistines or in league with them. Surrounded by Israelites, it was an ideal place to display the mutilated bodies of Saul and his sons.

c. The only other example of the burning of bodies by the people of God is in a prophecy of Amos (Amos 6:10). Cremation was, and still is, a common practice in pagan cultures; but it is definitely not a scriptural practice for Jews or Christians. The bodies of Saul and his sons had been mutilated; and they had been put on ignominious display by the Philistines. Perhaps the men of Jabesh-giliad considered it necessary to burn the remains in order to purify them ceremonially, for they had been handled and mistreated by the pagan Philistines, and to restore their dignity. It is important to remember that, in both this event and the prophecy of Amos, the setting was calamitous, and normal burial was not possible.

d. In the Marine Corps it is an inviolable rule that no Marine will be left behind on a battlefield, dead or alive. At times additional casualties are suffered in order to recover one dead Marine. This may sound irrational to those who have not experienced it; but it is a wonderful thing to know that you will not be abandoned, dead or alive. In the Korean War, on one occasion known to me, in an attack on the Chinese trenches, a lieutenant was killed and his body was entangled in the Chinese barbed wire. In the attempts to recover his body more Marines fell. When the Chinese soldiers began to desecrate the body publicly, one very brave Marine was able, in the dark, to get close enough to recover the lieutenant's dog tags; and then a napalm strike was called and the body was burned to prevent further desecration.